

# Session 2: Historical Context

Events leading to passage of ICWA  
Impacts of colonization on Alaska Native culture

# Historical Context

- Important to understand basis of ICWA provisions and intention behind them
- Important to understand devastating impacts of colonization because it is recent and continues to affect Alaska Native families
- History of colonization increases challenges we face today working with Native families because there is a cultural distrust and individuals may be suspicious of help from child protection agencies



# Historical Context

Alaska Native values vary by region, but also share some common values:

- Children viewed as gifts from Creator
- Harmony with each other and all living things
- Traditional lifeways
- Respect
- Sharing
- Rich traditions

Disrupted by Western contact

# Historical Context

## Some Major Impacts of Colonization:

- Disease and famine
- Religious conversion
- Boarding schools

## Many other interrelated/complex factors:

- Laws diminishing land ownership, access, and rights (Statehood, ANCSA)
- Disruption of traditional lifeways and imposition of cash economy (and accompanying limitations)
- Federal policies (relocation, for example)

# Historical Context

- Disease/Famine (19<sup>th</sup> century)
  - Smallpox, measles, influenza, cholera
  - No natural immunities
  - Traditional healers unable to control
- Results:
  - Tens of thousands of Alaska Native people died
  - Population shift – many elders died, leaving children behind
  - Disruption of leadership, knowledge

# Historical Context

- Religious conversion (late 1800s, early 1900s)
  - Sheldon Jackson's role
  - Alaska divided up by region/religion
  - Missions/orphanages became schools
  - Goal: forced assimilation using Christian institutions to teach and impose Western culture, and to eliminate traditional values and lifeways
- Results:
  - Loss of spirituality, culture, tradition, language

# Historical Context

## Boarding schools (1940s -1970s)

- Purpose: assimilation
- All children rounded up and moved
- Students not allowed to speak language, wear clothes, dance, etc.
- Few, if any, Native teachers
- Students were emotionally, physically and sexually abused

State began to provide local schools to villages only after litigation in the 1970s



# Historical Context

## Direct Impacts of Boarding Schools:

- Disparagement of culture (language, customs, subsistence skills)
- Loss of parent-child attachment
- Loss of parenting knowledge/behaviors
- Trauma to entire family caused by separation
- Impact on village as a whole
- Harmful behaviors such as physical and sexual abuse, alcohol abuse, and suicide.

# Historical Context

## Federal laws/policies prior to ICWA

- Native Allotment Act of 1906
- Indian Reorganization Act (1936)
- Relocation Act (1956)
- Indian Adoption project (1958-67)
- Statehood Act (1959)
- ANCSA (1971)

# Historical Context

Some impacts of these federal laws/policies:

- Shrinking land base
- Burdens on subsistence lifestyle
- Population shift
- Fragmentation of families
- Change in ability to self-govern
- Tensions between traditional tribal associations and Western style organizations
- Institutional racism

# Historical Context

- Historical Trauma: cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma.
- Some Effects:
  - Multi-generational emotional trauma
  - Depression
  - High rates of substance abuse
  - Significant problems of child abuse
  - Domestic violence
- Past unfair treatment can result in families distrusting participants in child protection system

# Resilience Through Connectedness

